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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5953
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3647
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3506
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4195
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1282
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 4137
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001565

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: TURKMEN PRESIDENT PARDONS 3,934 PRISONERS FOR
NEUTRALITY DAY

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11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for Internet distribution.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY. At a recent session of the State Security Council, for the occasion of Neutrality Day, President Berdimuhamedov signed a decree pardoning 3,934 prisoners. These individuals, including 19 foreigners, have been released from prison and, in some cases, from additional punishment in the form of internal exile. The pardon did not include any political prisoners. END SUMMARY.

NEUTRALITY DAY PARDONING

13. (SBU) At the December 2 session of the State Security Council, Berdimuhamedov signed a decree pardoning prisoners on the occasion of the upcoming Neutrality Day holiday on December 12. Noting that another act of pardoning is a tribute to humane Turkmen traditions, the president announced that 3,934 convicts, including 19 foreigners, will return to their homes for the holiday. Having signed the decree on pardoning, Berdimuhamedov instructed relevant officials to take all measures to enable pardoned persons to celebrate the holiday at their homes among their families. Thus, according to the presidential decree, 3,934 persons have been pardoned, released from further serving their prison sentences and also from additional punishment in the form of internal exile.

THE PARDONING STATISTICS

14. (SBU) Out of the total 3,934 persons pardoned by the Presidential decree, the names of 3,915 persons were published in December 3rd issues of local newspapers. The remaining 19 persons were foreigners and their names are normally not published. Only 252 out of 3,915 published names are those who were convicted before 2008-2009, which is 6.4 percent. The figure includes one

person convicted in 2000, one in 2001, three in 2002, 17 in 2003, 12 in 2004, 16 in 2005, 17 in 2006, and 185 in 2007. In terms of gender, among the 3,915 names published, 3,808 are men and 107 are women. Post found no names of individuals of concern on the list, neither those convicted for alleged involvement in November 2002 assassination attempt on President Niyazov, nor persons of individual human rights concern.

BACKGROUND

15. (SBU) The Neutrality Day pardoning is this year's third. The first one came ahead of National Flag Day, a holiday marked on February 19, and the second one happened this fall on the occasion of Gadyr Gijesi (Night of Omnipotence), the final night of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. In December 1999, then President Saparmurat Niyazov issued a decree ordering official pardoning to mark Gadyr Gijesi, and during his term of office those were the country's only annual pardonings. President Berdimuhamedov conducts pardonings of smaller numbers of prisoners several times a year on the occasion of significant events, such as Neutrality Day.

16. (SBU) COMMENT. Although the list does not state what crime a person was charged for, according to many local residents, the list predominantly consists of those persons who committed petty crimes in 2008 and 2009. While the act of pardoning is welcomed by many as a humanitarian act, particularly in light of horrendous prison conditions, the repeated failure of such pardons to include political prisoners indicates the limits of the current Turkmen leadership's willingness to

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forgive and forget. END COMMENT.

ECKSTROM